What Is Claimed:

1. A method for modifying an image produced by an application program on the display screen of a computer system, the computer system running the application program under an operating system having a graphical user interface, the method comprising the steps of introducing into the screen a multimedia animated character, said character being a changing image which appears on the screen intrusively in a manner which is unpredictable for the computer user and which is completely beyond the user's control, said character being produced by executeable code provided to the computer system, the executeable code being determined by what other executeable code is available on the computer ssystem.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein said character moves translationally on the computer screen.

3. The method according to any preceding claim utilized in an operating system which produces multilayer window images on the screen, said character being located in the uppermost layer of the application program window, so that a user cannot move it off the screen or cover it with other objects.

4. The method according to any preceding claim, wherein said character is accompanied by synchronized sound.

5. The method according to any preceding claim, wherein the character overlies an existing image produced on the screen by the application program, a portion of the character being transparent, so that a portion of the existing image can be seen therethrough.

6. The method according to any preceding claim, wherein the generation of said character is controlled with signals stored in a database in response to an exchange of information from the user's computer.

7. A method according to claim 6, wherein said signals stored in the database define a plurality of said characters which are selected and controlled according to information from the user's computer which is not under the user's control and technical features available in the user's computer.

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8. The method of claim 6 or 7, wherein the user's computer is connected to a network, to which there is also connected a character controlling server, in communication with the user's computer, the server having access to the database, said method further comprising the steps of producing a series of instructions executed in the server through an interactive process between the user's computer and the server, to determine a sequence of commands that selects control signals corresponding to one of the characters from said database, and sending the commands to the user's computer for use in introducing the character into the application program image.

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9. The method of claim 8, wherein the application program is a browser and the commands are provided to the user's computer within an HTML page being viewed by the user.

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10. The method of claim 9 wherein the HTML page being viewed by the user was received from a content provider's server and the character is introduced therein as a result of tags left in the page by the content provider.

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11. The method of claim 1, wherein the executable code for the character is incorporated in one of installation media and an installation file for the application program, and the executable code is installed at the same time as the application program.

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12. A method for introducing advertising material into multimedia content being viewed by a user over a computer network in which the user's computer is a client running an application program under an operating system having a graphical user interface, the content being received from a content provider's

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computer acting as a content server, there also being connected to the network a computer operated by a media source acting as a character controlling server, the method comprising the steps of:

5   sending content from the content server to the client and providing in the content a tag communicating to the character controlling server; and

at the character controlling server, upon being contacted by the client, transferring to the client control signals that will produce on the clients computer display of the content of a multimedia animated character, said character being a changing image which appears on the content intrusively in a manner which is

10   unpredictable for the computer user and which is completely beyond the his control, the control signals being determined by what executeable code is available on the user's computer.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the media source receives

15   payment based upon the number of accesses to a character and the duration of an access.

14. The method according to claim 12 or 13, wherein said character moves translationally on the computer screen.

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15. The method according to any one of claims 12-14 utilized in an operating system which produces multilayer window images on the screen, said character being located in the uppermost layer of the application program window, so that a user cannot move it off the screen or cover it with other objects.

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16. The method according to any one of claims 12-15, wherein said character is accompanied by synchronized sound.

17. The method according to any one of claims 12-16, wherein the

30   character overlies an existing image produced on the screen by the application

program, a portion of the character being transparent, so that a portion of the existing image can be seen therethrough.

18. The method according to any one of claims 12-17, wherein said control signals are generated on the basis of information stored in a database in response to an exchange of information from the user's computer.

19. The method according to any one of claims 12- 18, wherein said signals stored in the database define a plurality of said characters which are selected and controlled according to information from the user's computer which is not under the user's control and technical features available in the user's computer.

20. The method according to claim 7 or19 wherein the information from the user's computer is derived from a cookie stored within the computer.

21. A method for providing an electronic greeting from a sender to a recipient over a computer network in which the computers of both are clients running an application program under an operating system having a graphical user interface, the greeting being produced by a media source's computer acting as a media server acting as a character controlling server, there also being connected to the network a computer operated by a content provider, the method comprising the steps of:

at the senders computer selecting characteristics of the greeting, including a character to present the greeting, the recipient and the message to be sent;

at the character controlling server, upon being contacted by the sender, sending to the recipient control signals that will produce on the recipients computer display a multimedia animated character delivering the message, said character being a changing image which appears on the content intrusively in a manner which is unpredictable for the recipient and which is completely beyond the his control, the control signals being determined by what executeable code is available on the user's

computer, the server also providing a signal to the recipient which will call a page provided by the content provider as background to the character and remains after the message is delivered.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the media source receives payment from the content provider based upon the number of times the content provider's page is delivered as background to a greeting.

23. A system for modifying an image produced by an application program on the display screen of a computer, the computer running the application program under an operating system having a graphical user interface, comprising:

a generator of media signals which are configured to produce on the user's display of the application program a multimedia animated character, the content of the media signals being determined by what executeable code is available on the user's computer, said character being a changing image which appears on the screen intrusively in a manner which is unpredictable for the computer user and which is completely beyond the user's control; and

means for introducing the character to the user's computer display.

24. The of claim 23, wherein said media signals are configured to produces a character that moves translationally on the computer screen.

25. The system of any one of claims 23 or 24 wherein operating system produces multilayered window images on the screen, said said media signals being configured to located the character in the uppermost layer of the application program window, so that a user cannot move it off the screen or cover it with other objects.

26. The system according to any one of claims 23-25, wherein said media signal is configured so that the character is accompanied by synchronized

sound.

27.   The system according to any one of claims 23-26, wherein the media signal is configured so that the character overlies an existing image produced on the screen by the application program and a portion of the character is transparent, so that a portion of the existing image can be seen therethrough.

28.   The system according to any one of claims 23-27, wherein the media signal is generated based upon information stored in a database in response to an exchange of information from the user's computer.

29. A system according to claim 28, wherein the information stored in the database defines a plurality of characters, the system further comprising a selector responsive to information from the user's computer which is not under the user's control and technical features available in the user's computer to select media signals corresponding to one of the characters.

30. The system of claim 28 or 29, further comprising a connection between the user's computer and a network, a character controlling server also connected to the network in communication with the user's computer, the server having access to the database, said media signal generator being controlled through interactive communication between the user's computer and the server.

31. The system of claim 30, wherein the application program is a browser and the media signals are provided to the user's computer along with an HTML page being processed by the user's computer.

32. The system of claim 31 further comprising content provider's server connected to the network for communication with the user's computer the HTML page being viewed being received from content provider's server, the character being introduced as a result of tags left in the page by the content

character being introduced as a result of tags left in the page by the content provider.

33.   The system of claim 1, wherein the generator comprises a computer program that is installed on the user's computer at the same time as the application program from one of installation media and an installation file for the application program.

34. The method of any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the executeable code provided to the computer system includes a combination of technologies which simulates the operation of Internet Explorer 4 (and above) using Flash 4 (and above), at least to the extent of achieving synchronization of sound with video, free movement of the character and the ability to make it any shape.

35. The method of claim 34 wherein the combination of technologies includes one of the following:

Windows IE v4.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Windows IE v4.0 or newer without Flash;

Windows Netscape v4.1 or newer without Flash;

Macintosh Netscape v4.0 or newer without Flash;

Windows Netscape v4.1 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Macintosh Netscape v4.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Windows Netscape v6.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Macintosh Netscape v6.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer; and

Macintosh IE v5.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer.

36. The method of any one of claims 12 to 22, wherein the control signals include a combination of technologies which simulates the operation of Internet Explorer 4 (and above) using Flash 4 (and above), at least to the extent of achieving synchronization of sound with video, free movement of the character and

the ability to make it any shape.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein the combination of technologies includes one of the following:

Windows IE v4.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Windows IE v4.0 or newer without Flash;

Windows Netscape v4.1 or newer without Flash;

Macintosh Netscape v4.0 or newer without Flash;

Windows Netscape v4.1 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Macintosh Netscape v4.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Windows Netscape v6.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Macintosh Netscape v6.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer; and

Macintosh IE v5.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer.

38. The system of any one of claims 23 to 33, wherein the the executeable code include a combination of technologies which simulates the operation of Internet Explorer 4 (and above) using Flash 4 (and above), at least to the extent of achieving synchronization of sound with video, free movement of the character and the ability to make it any shape.

39. The system of claim 38 wherein the combination of technologies includes one of the following:

Windows IE v4.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Windows IE v4.0 or newer without Flash;

Windows Netscape v4.1 or newer without Flash;

Macintosh Netscape v4.0 or newer without Flash;

Windows Netscape v4.1 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Macintosh Netscape v4.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Windows Netscape v6.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer;

Macintosh Netscape v6.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer; and

Macintosh IE v5.0 or newer with Flash v.4.0 or newer.